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ABSTRACT

A literature course developed at the College of Staten Island concerns the human experience with other animals and the environment. Recently, the course has been significantly altered in line with insights gained through participation in a faculty seminar on the topic of inclusion of the "other." The alterations in the course design reflected the insights gained concerning intellectual accuracy and cultural sensitivity. One of the most significant issues for any teacher concerned with multicultural education is text selection. In terms of objectives, texts were chosen primarily so that students might be able to make connections between texts, exemplified by the notion of "cluster" which included primarily images of nature and humanity. Further, the course emphasizes the multiple readings of texts, a primary feature of current reader theory. Texts used in past semesters were rejected as representing non-inclusive language. At the course's inception, students are asked to write 10 sentences beginning with "Nature is..." and 10 beginning with "Humans are..." Course readings followed a roughly chronological order and included "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," "Frankenstein," "Song of Lawino," "Nectar in a Sieve," "Precious Bane," "Walden," "Animal Liberation," "Cree Hunters of the Mistassini," "The Solace of Open Space," "The Old Man and the Sea," and "Reinventing Eve." Student reaction to the readings demonstrated the students' ability to focus closely on the themes of the course. (A list of the required texts for the course is attached.) (HB)

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Margery Cornwell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"A Bird in the Hand Is a Certainty, but a Bird in the Bush May Sing": Description of a Literature Course about Humans and Nature Using a Curriculum of Inclusion

Margery Cornwell

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"When April came we were still ploughing, and I was so used to it that I'd given over being tired,and enjoyed it, and sang to myself the while. It was grand to go down the red furrow with the share cutting strong into the stiff earth and shining like silver. It was fine to look away to the blue hills by Lullingford, and see the woods of oak and larch and willow all in bud between, as if a warm wind blew from there and called the leaves. It was pleasant, too, seeing the rooks follow in a string at my heels, looking as if they'd been polished with the andiron brush, and to see the birds again that had been away, and to hear the waterousel sing wild and sweet, and the lapwings change their winter cry for summat warmer."

Prue Sarn (Precious Bane 120)

When a few weeks had gone by, the seed sprouted; tender shoots appeared, thrusting upwards with increasing strength, and soon we were able to transplant the seedlings one by one, and at first they stood out singly, slender, tremulous spires with spaces between: but grew and grew and soon were merged into one thick green field of rustling paddy. In that field, in the grain which had not yet begun to form, lay our future and our hope. Hope, and fear. Twin forces that tugged at us first in one direction and then in another, and which was the stronger no one could say."

Rukmani (Nectar in a Sieve 83)

Prue Sarn, a woman laboring on her farm in England in the early nineteenth century, and Rukmani, a woman laboring on her farm in India in the twentieth century, share the same love for and concern about the natural processes that control their destinies. Their memories dominate two of the books on the reading list of a special course I taught in the fall of 1991.

For the past fifteen years at the College of Staten Island, I have been teaching literature courses about the human experience with other animals and the environment. I often change material depending on students' needs and interests and my current enthusiasms. A new challenge informed my choices for my class of September, 1991. During the preceding year I had received

released time to attend a weekly Faculty Development Seminar entitled "Balancing the Curriculum for Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class" with sixteen other professors from CUNY. Although the idea of a curriculum of inclusion was not unique to me, the richness of the material we read in the seminar and the depth of our discussions changed my teaching permanently. Critics who dismiss as extreme and dogmatic those who attempt the "politically correct" approach fail to acknowledge their serious goals of intellectual accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

My commitment to "balancing" did not develop through a flashy conversion experience. It grew through careful reading and consideration of the selections from our thirty-page bibliography and through open, sometimes painful, discussion about the different perceptions of the participants in our seminar. This was a substantial educational exercise in which one could not participate without being changed.

I considered how to alter my next literature course, to help my students make some of the connections I had found significant in the seminar. To devise a curriculum which introduces material considered unusual by colleagues and administration would not be new for me. When I had proposed my first "Literature and Environment" course fifteen years before, the subject matter (animals), the principal form (essay), and the preparation of the teacher ("Are you an English teacher or a science teacher?") were suspect. I persisted because I believe that attitudes will change only if many writers, teachers, and scientists question the

designation of "other" to that which is "different," whether it be genre, gender, ethnicity, species, sexual preference, religion or ability. Feminists, modern nature writers, and multicultural advocates have produced much scholarship that documents the ways the "other" has been objectified and excluded.

Probably the most troubling issue to both advocates and skeptics of multicultural education is the choosing of texts. Skeptics ask if valuable, traditional material is being eliminated in order to include work that has not been presented before. Advocates wonder if only token works, an "add-and-mix" combination, are being introduced to salve our educational consciences. Altagracia Ortiz, one of the leaders of our Development Seminar, suggested that the universal quality of my subject provided a safeguard against peppering principally traditional texts with a dash of multicultural flavor. This subject has been written about so extensively from so many points of view that it would not be likely I would be tempted to use material by nine European-American men and only one African-American woman and feel that I had designed a curriculum of inclusion.

For thousands of years, wherever humans have sought food or contemplated a thunderstorm or a blackbird, they have tried to understand nature and their place in it. During a four-month semester, one can examine only a small portion of the literary work concerning this complex subject, yet it was specifically the vast selection from which choices could be made when planning ENL 399 that fascinated and challenged me. As I was trying to establish

criteria for preferences of texts, I kept stumbling over the phrase, making connections. That was what I wanted my students to do: make connections.

While searching for an image to exemplify what these connections were and what material would be used to make them clear, I summoned up a picture of a version of the "cluster," a diagram I sometimes offer to my composition students as a form of brainstorming. The center of this figure is a circle with one's general topic in it; for me this was Humans and Nature. In a "cluster" there are several stems radiating from the central circle with circles at their ends. In my second set of circles I placed various recurrent themes: Nature/Superstition/Religion; Traditional/Rural vs. Technological/Urban; Ecofeminism; and Nature as Other. In my "cluster" another set of stems with circles also radiated from the center but extended beyond the group of theme circles. In these circles were the names of the books and films I proposed for the course. I then drew lines from book to theme and from book to book, weaving and intersecting, creating a web with some strong dominant strands and other more delicate, subtle ones.

In Nectar in a Sieve, for example, the complications of modernization as it confronts Rukmani's traditionally rural lifestyle are demonstrated in her aversion to the city and the tannery while, on the other hand, she embraces the medical care of a Western doctor and treasures her ability to read and write, an ability unknown to most women in rural India. The line of this book in the cluster is firmly connected with the theme circle about

technology and tradition. However, it also loops to the superstition circle as the doctor, Kenny, despairs of what he considers the ignorant superstition of the indigenous Indian population. As indicated in the intial passage of this paper, one of the lines in the cluster must also go from Nectar in a Sieve to Precious Bane in which another woman, Prue Sarn, wrestles with her ambivalence about the harshness of rural life while loving the feel of the natural cycles and animals which surround her. Prue, like Rukmani, finds solace in being able to read and write. She is trapped in a social structure that embraces both superstition and religion, sometimes distinguishing between the two; sometimes not. This further connects her to Rukmani. These were the kinds of connections I wanted my students to make in ENL 399 in the fall of 1991.

As a literature teacher, I hope to share with my students the tools of my profession. I want them to understand how they can relate to others through shared thoughts and emotions and how they can gather new experiences as they read. I encourage them to see the universal reflected in specifics, to contemplate symbols, to look at the beauty of language and its structures, to note how style seduces, instructs and changes. In addition to these basic characteristics of any literature course, in this particular one I wanted to present a variety of genres, historical periods and ethnic backgrounds. Under the general heading of humans and nature, the recurrent themes designated in my "cluster" must be emphasized. What is nature? What is human? Are they the same or

different? Why and where did we/it begin? Where are we going?

I accept the postmodernist view that there are various readings available for a text, and while the focus of this course was on the human relationship with nature, I often indicated a variety of possible readings, some of which I mention in this paper, for my students.

When I taught courses about humans and nature before, many of the works I assigned were the books I read when I first discovered that this topic would be the basis for my doctoral work and, indeed, for much of my future professional writing and teaching. Now when I read Loren Eiseley, one of my early mentors, his work feels dated; the word man dominates the text. Should I continue to use The Immense Journey and discuss the changes that have taken place in language, or should I look for a more current expression of the same ideas expressed as beautifully? One of my favorite texts was Isak Dinesen's Out of Africa, until I was strongly reprimanded by an editor of a feminist publication when I wrote a paper examining Dinesen's style. Her criticism was based on Dinesen's colonialist lifestyle; I had responded to the beauty of Dinesen's natural descriptions because I had lived in East Africa for three years. In focusing on one aspect of her work, had I failed to adequately discuss her colonialist/racist attitudes? I asked Zonella, a student from Barbados who had been in a class when I used the book, if she had been offended. She defended Dinesen as someone of her time and ahead of her time, a person who did look upon the Africans as "other," in a patronizing manner, but someone

who was also capable of viewing them as individuals worthy of admiration and record. In spite of Zonella's reassurances, I decided not to use Out of Africa in ENL 399 in the fall. I have to consider this further. Should I ever use it again? Should I use it and offer various readings? I will always experiment with the presentation and analysis of new and old texts. My bookshelves are full but will continue to grow.

When the time for preparation was over, and thirty-five students and I gathered in J-8 on Sept. 5, I asked them to write ten sentences beginning with the words "Nature is...." and ten sentences beginning with "Humans are...." They shared their lists in small groups. While some students produced easy cliches, the discussions quickly revealed that the subject was complex and ambiguous, not one to be dismissed with easy answers. In fact, there were more questions than answers, a situation we came to accept throughout the semester. Are humans a part of nature or apart from nature? Is nature "out there" or "in here"? Do all cultures define nature the same way? Most of the students agreed that the sunset they see over the Adirondacks when they visit the family cabin in upstate New York is nature, but they weren't so sure about nuclear weapons. One group argued for half an hour about whether the rainbow in a puddle of water that one student had listed was really nature since it had probably been caused by oil leaking into the water from a car. Is that nature?

I had adopted a loose chronological shape for the readings of the course, so the semester began with Sir Gawain and the Green

Knight in a lively translation by Burton Raffel. While we did not consider the verse form and cultural context in the same way one would in a medieval literature course (as is generally the case in a thematic course), this poem provided an excellent introduction to the interplay between nature, superstition and religion which has been pervasive throughout all times and in all places when people have tried to interpret the natural phenomena with which they live closely; in addition, Sir Gawain is representative of all human seekers attempting to find an acceptable position in relation to the creative force which controls nature and their lives. To connect the students with the questions they had asked the previous session, I asked further questions. What, indeed, is the attitude toward nature in this poem? How did the Celtic and Christian beliefs adapt to each other? (While we were reading this poem, I showed a film of the Padstow Mayday Ritual, a ceremony in which ancient vegetation and regeneration myths continue to be honored in villages in England.) What does the Green Knight represent? And what about the women in this society where Gawain carries the pentangle of Christian knighthood on his shield? The endeles knot of the pentangle and the significance of each of its points indicates the deeply entwined qualities of masculinity, aristocracy and Christianity supported by the culture. Guinevere and Mary are presented as passive and objectified, significant only in relationship to their lords. Why is Morgan generally given brief critical acknowledgment even though she is central to the action? One critic suggests Morgan is ignored because she is a disrupter of

the "male homosocial bond," a dangerous threat to the masculine.(SWLMRW 72)

In several other works considered throughout the semester the students encountered woman as witch, a designation often given because of the woman's connection with natural/supernatural phenomena. I talked with them about some of the concepts of ecofeminism which suggest that the domination of nature and woman is connected. Ecofeminists maintain that historically men have divided the world into two camps, one representing intellect/production/transcendence/masculine and the other representing emotion/reproduction/immanence/feminine; the second group of traits has been looked upon as less valuable, an "other." This divided way of perceiving the world is one of the causes for the ecological crisis we face today. It was addressed in several of the materials we considered throughout the semester: technology and tradition collide, God is proposed as an immanent goddess rather than transcendent God, and Frankenstein creates a monster he cannot love or control. We concluded the term with a glance at creation myths, including some goddess stories, examining the implications of the Judeo-Christian story of Adam and Eve in which the Fall was orchestrated by a woman and an animal.

After reading the second book of the course, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the students, whose previous attitudes about this story were derived from various film versions, became advocates for the Creature. Their journals were full of sadness on his behalf. (As a result of her journal entry, Kathy* wrote a longer paper

*Student participants are referred to by first name.

comparing the fate of Frankenstein's Creature and Edward Scissorhands, a creation from a popular film, indicating how a creator's attitude changes a creation.) I responded to the students' compassion for the Creature with queries about why Frankenstein could not love his creation and why he created him initially, urging them to consider parallels between Frankenstein's obsessive overreaching and ultimate devastation and our society's technological arrogance. The problem of commitment to science and technology as the single idea of progress, initiated for the class with this book, became a major topic examined in connection with other books, whether it was an instrumental factor in the industrial revolution or a driving force in the Western colonial domination in East Africa.

Mary Shelley's typically- Romantic depiction of a distant and elegant nature in Frankenstein contrasts somewhat with her subtitle, The Modern Prometheus; today we attribute to this subtitle a surprisingly modern indictment of concentration on the rational faculties divorced from conscience. The contrast between nature-in-self and nature-as-other interests us.

We turned to Gilbert's and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic for a feminist look at Frankenstein. They suggest that the motherless nineteen-year-old Mary Shelley of notable literary heritage produced a book about orphans, incest, and Original Sin, a mock Paradise Lost, in which "the part of Eve is all the parts." (MA 230)

Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol is a poem by Okot p'Bitek, an

Acoli writer from East Africa who wrote the poem first in Acoli and translated it into English. Lawino is a woman who embraces traditional village life as opposed to her husband, Ocol, who wants to adopt modern (read Western) ways and education and takes up with a woman who does the same. Lawino, who expresses the attitude of the author, is witty, intelligent, and convincing, flaunting vivid metaphors:

> When the beautiful one
> With whom I share my husband
> Returns from cooking her hair
> She resembles
> A chicken
> That has fallen into a pond;
> Her hair looks
> Like the python's discarded skin.
>
> They cook their hair
> With hot iron
> And pull it hard
> So that it may grow long.
> Then they rope the hair
> On wooden pens
> Like a billy goat
> Brought for the sacrifice
> Struggling to free itself. (SL 54)

The rich combination of nature/superstition/religion is evident when she speaks. My students' journals blossomed with support of Lawino against missionary teachings, modern medicine, Western apparel and dancing. "Let no one uproot the pumpkin" became a standard phrase during the semester to indicate support for traditional attitudes and practices. However, when Camille used the word primitive to describe Lawino, I realized that we had to consider what primitive meant and what loaded messages language can send. The students liked Lawino's attitude but did not really

understand her. She was vibrant and colorful, but could her lifestyle somehow be dismissed as distant, almost fictional? Did her depiction reinforce my Western students' idea that Africans are interesting to talk about but very different? Was the chasm yawning larger or smaller? To incite them to talk about this, I told them of some of the dilemmas I confronted when I lived in East Africa. Is modern medicine all bad? Is it better to put porridge on a child's head if she has ringworm, as Lawino advocates, than to use medicine? On the other hand, what common sense can be seen in many of the traditional rituals? This experience was crucial in enabling the students to see that when confronting other cultures, easy Western answers or dismissals are usually not adequate, sensitive or useful.

A strong complement to our reading of Song of Lawino was a trip to the Center for African Studies. We attended an exhibit demonstrating how African artists have combined Western influences of the last one hundred years with traditional attitudes.
It was instructive and problematic for my students to see a coffin of a rich man built in the shape of a Mercedes Benz and a wise seer portrayed with a television set in his chest. It was important for them to hear that to admire only wooden fertility statues as African art is to deny Africans a place in the future.

Michael wrote a paper about the Mapplethorpe controversy, skillfully incorporating passages from Song of Lawino to indicate an honest appreciation of the human body which he feels is lacking in our society. He and I talked in conference about the Puritan

ethic which the Western world tried to impose on all the worlds it encountered in its colonialist adventures and the strong hold it still maintains on much modern American thought.

When I introduced Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya, a story of a tenant farmer woman in India, I invited my Indian friend and colleague, Sita Kapadia, to talk with us. One student asked Sita, "Why does Rukmani's husband have the Western name of Nathan?" "I would have called him Nathan," replied Sita, changing the long a sound to an ah sound. The atmosphere of the class was instantly infused with the sounds of India. She described the significance of the temple with its mountains of rice for the poor to which Rukmani and Nathan turn in desperation when they travel to the city in search of their employed son after they lose their farm because of natural disasters. The killing of a snake by Nathan in Rukmani's garden assumed great importance as Sita detailed the cobra's role in the Hindu religion. The students wanted to know how Rukmani could accept so much sadness and loss in her life--starvation of an infant, disappearance of her sons, loss of her land, and prostitution of her daughter--and still maintain calm courage. Sita explained about dharma. There were many questions about the caste system which she answered calmly and clearly.

One of our primary considerations when discussing Nectar in a Sieve was how the introduction of a tannery is intrusive and destructive to the lives of the villagers. On the other hand, we wondered what could be done to change their total dependence on nature. Rukman says, "Nature is like a wild animal that you have

trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat." (NS 43) She understands and loves the natural environment in which she lives; she cannot tolerate life in the city. However, she does treasure her ability to read and write and she accepts the medical services of a Western doctor, Kenny, making it possible for her to bear the desired boychildren. As a symbol of Westerners who seek to help developing countries, Kenny gains some understanding of the strengths of the indigenous culture while despairing of the commitment to what he considers superstition.

My students were very fond of this novel, a sort of Asian soap opera with some important ideas. They responded to Rukmani's drive for survival and her care for her husband and children. They often made comparisons between her life and that of Prue Sarn whose story we considered next.

Precious Bane is a novel by Mary Webb about farm life on the Welsh border in the early nineteenth century. The protagonist Prue Sarn has a harelip, the result, according to local superstition, of a hare's crossing her mother's path when she was pregnant. Because of this and her ability to read and write, Prue is considered strange. This beautiful novel presents a rural society on the cusp of the industrial revolution and carefully describes threshing, ploughing with horses, weaving, and dairying. The film of Silas Marner helped underscore the severity and practicality of the life of the villagers and the class structure which divided the rural

and the urban. Silas Marner and Kester Woodseaves, the gently courageous character in Precious Bane, who foils the village bull-baiting and also saves Prue from those determined to destroy her, are both weavers. They serve as symbols of the emerging revolution which will replace their occupations and reorganize the villagers' lives.

Prue reveals herself through first-person narrative as a remarkable, sensitive woman influenced by nature, which appears in most of the metaphors for her feelings; by traditional religion; and by local superstitions, such as sin eating and love spinning.

The day we were to discuss Walden, Paulette and Lesley, single mothers with small children, started complaining even before I had taken off my coat. "Who is this guy? Sure, I'd like to have time to go sit by a pond and feel tranquil. Give me a break! This is unreal." I realized that our task was to go back and look closely at the text with which the students had some difficulty, to avoid "grabbing" at partial ideas, to try to be sure that the message was understood before disagreement were stated. Lesley finally decided that maybe she could understand about "Simplify, simplify," because she really wanted to move her son and daughter to New Mexico and away from the television set. Paulette agreed that maybe just the fact that she was in college at her age might suggest that she knew how to follow her dream. But we weren't finished yet with Walden as symbol. Maryann Langelle, another friend and colleague, visits Walden Woods regularly. I invited her to share her maps, her sketches, and her motivation. She spoke of

her dismay over the development that is proposed for part of Walden Woods and of her historical knowledge about Thoreau. She read some of her favorite passages.

The following week Susan announced that she had an extra ticket for a concert at Madison Square Garden to be given by various rock groups as a benefit to raise money to thwart the developer who was planning a condominium for one portion of Walden Woods. Andrea reported that she had heard the concert discussed on the evening news; one of the anchorpersons "who didn't know what he was talking about" had mentioned that Walden Woods was in upper New York state.

Many of my students, native Staten Islanders, have watched forested areas where they played as children become part of the giant garbage dump that the City of New York maintains in their borough. The construction of the Verrazano Bridge filled their relatively uninhabited island with thousands of unhappy citizens from Brooklyn. They have first-hand experience of urban encroachment on undeveloped land. It was not difficult for them to understand the need to save Walden Woods as a symbol of space free from human domination.

Students who had opened our discussion about Walden with resistance discovered how they could make connections with some of Thoreau's messages. I furnished another example of how necessary it is to make proper interpretations in order to receive correct information. Historically, for numerous and often unsubstantiated reasons, humans have anthropomorphically categorized animals as

"good" or "bad." The wolf has been portrayed as a ravenous beast, devouring every living creature in its path indiscriminately; the only good wolf is a dead wolf. This prejudice has imposed itself on our language. I reminded the students of Little Red Riding Hood. Then I told them a story. A class of elementary children was asked to draw a picture of a wolf before a wolf was brought to visit their classroom. Most of the children drew animals with enormous fangs. Then the wolf came into the room. After the wolf left, they were asked to draw another picture of it. This time the animal had no fangs and enormous feet. My students agreed that because of the availability of factual information about wolves and other free-living animals, the inaccurate myths are dying.

Animal Liberation, considered one of the primary documents to furnish a rational basis for the current animal rights movement, provided a change in genre. Peter Singer, the author, is a moral philosopher, a writer of persuasive essays. The students worked in groups, wrestling with his dense form of logic, as they struggled to determine why most humans feel a chimp and an oyster are closer than a chimp and a human. What is the difference between equality, equal treatment and equal consideration? Is equality based on sameness? Obviously, these considerations do not address only relationships between human and animal, but between humans as well.

The main thrust of Animal Liberation is documentated in two lengthy chapters, one on animal experimentation and the other on factory farming. The students were troubled and challenged by the

idea that our technological development has led us to consider sentient beings as tools for research to be manipulated and tampered with. Which experiments are valid? Which are redundant? Are there valid alternatives to animals for testing and eating? Discussions were heated. "No one is going to tell me what to eat. We are supposed to use animals," stated Marion. "When was the last time you cut off a chicken's head?" shouted Louise. I showed a film.

Cree Hunters of the Mistassani portrays the life of a group of Native Americans who live and hunt in the James Bay area of Canada. Their respect for the environment is manifested through religious ritual and practical management of the land and the wildlife with which they have lived for centuries. Theirs is a contemporary example of what happens when traditional lifestyles confront modern technological needs. Eventually the entire area on which these Native Americans subsist, a landmass about the size of Germany, will be covered with water to provide hydroelectricity for large metropolitan areas, including New York City. During the semester of our class, a Cree chief came to New York City to make a plea for his land.

While many students had difficulty watching the Crees kill and skin animals in the film, the material about their lifestyle and its imminent extinction seemed to impress on the students that they have some responsibilities for lives beyond their own. "I could not kill the food I eat." "Is it worse to eat meat you don't kill yourself?" "How could I possibly reduce the amount of

electricity I use?"

An article by Wendell Berry from Harper's, explaining why he would not buy a PC and the responses that were written to his article, consolidated much of the discussion about the pros and cons of technology in American society. Throughout the semester, there was never a paucity of current media material to emphasize the incongruities between technological development and traditional lifestyles. In a bizarre twist on the wonders of modern science, the same day that Larry brought an article about the proposed patenting of a robot bartender for one's own home, Dana brought one about how men in Egypt are selling their kidneys to be used for transplants in order to support their families.

When Gretel Erhlich describes the Native American Sun Dance in The Solace of Open Spaces, the focus on the individual's responsibility to the group, whether the group be tribal or planetary, continues. In the form of the dance she presents, the men dance for four days without food or water in one-hundred degree heat. What is the meaning of this suffering? Ehrlich insists that it is not sun worship. It is an "inculcation of regenerative power that restores health, vitality, and harmony to the land and all tribes." (SOS 106) She feels the men are dancing "not for our sins but to ignite our hearts." (SOS 112) These dancing men represent mythic saviors from countless cultures who have sacrificed in the past and continue to sacrifice in order that their people might continue to receive the beneficence of the natural world.

When we visited Objects of Myth and Memory: American Indian

Art at the Brooklyn Museum, we were surrounded with reminders that the Native Americans, whose art was represented with baskets, dolls and wood carvings, did not consider the world of nature a wilderness to be suppressed but a place in which to live, a place with which they had to cooperate, a place from which they derived all their life and all their art. Religious designs were woven into the baskets they used every day.

The Brooklyn Museum addressed the ethical considerations of ethnological collecting through seminars and films. This particular collection was acquired by Stewart Culin between 1903-1911. Culin kept careful notebooks in which he expressed his fear that these objects would cease to be made. Other exhibits of work by contemporary Native Americans happily proved him wrong.

For Gretel Ehrlich, the nature of the open spaces is a testing ground for Native American, Western cowboy, man, and woman alike, a place of great privation and great sustenance. Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea experiences nature as a continuum of pursuing and being pursued. If "everything kills everything else," everything also nourishes everything else. His salvation comes through his connection with all of nature--marlin, shark, lion, turtle and la mar. Like Ehrlich, he escapes to nature to establish his selfhood. He is defeated, but not destroyed.

As we had already worked through several small research papers, I asked for the final paper of the course to be a personal narrative, describing an optimal "space"--physically, spiritually, intellectually, aesthetically, with an explanation of what would

keep one from achieving this space. The rich and serious revelations I received from my students often incorporated past journeys of the spirit. Many students joined Ehrlich and Santiago in open natural settings. Almost all identified with some character in the books we had read.

I left the problems of creation and the divine hand in it until the end of the term even though the nature/superstition/religion motif had woven itself throughout much of our work. Spirit and Nature is a video that was made at a conference concerning the contemporary religious perception of humans and nature held at Middlebury College. Theologians representing Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Native American religions and the Dalai Lama himself gave lectures and were interviewed by Bill Moyers. Seyyed Hossein Hasr, a professor of Islamic studies, emphasized how Renaissance humanism elevated rational, scientific thought above all other means of approaching the natural world. Sallie McFague, a Protestant theologian, presented the problem of a transcendent sky god, a distant father, as opposed to a god who is immanent, a mother, lover, friend. "If we are in a world that one imagines to be the body of God, one would treat that world very, very differently." The Dalai Lama and Native American Elder Audrey Shenandoah felt it unnecessary to talk about religion and nature as something "outside" but rather insisted that the spirit of the world should be incorporated in all life. "Taking care of the planet is nothing special or nothing sacred or nothing holy. It's just something like taking care of

one's own house. We have no other planet, no other house, except this." (The Dalai Lama) Obviously much of the reading and discussion of the semester prepared the students for this video. Many expressed satisfaction, a sense of closure, after viewing it.

In Revinventing Eve, our final book, Kim Chernin reiterates the ecofeminist theme through vivid autobiographical anecdotes, revising the Biblical story and presenting a strong image of the Woman Who Is Not Yet. Chernin feels that if we continue to singlemindedly embrace the idea of domination of nature and linear technological progress, the male sphere, we will destroy our natural balance and ultimately ourselves. In Turtle Diary, a film we viewed earlier in the semester, two ordinary, dispirited Londoners decide to free the turtles from the London Zoo with the aid of the turtles' keeper. "They are in prison," says the woman. "They aren't the only ones," says the man. In this dramatic act, unique for both of the protagonists, they find that they are not only releasing the turtles but also freeing themselves. We can save them and save ourselves, or we can destroy them and ourselves. We have a choice, but not for long.

It is difficult in our profession to judge how successful one has been in helping students resonate to beautiful language and new ideas. Many of us look to their journals, final papers and final examinations in an attempt to form a determination of this success. How can our students really share with us what they have learned? One of my final exam questions asked for a discussion of style, always a risky business in undergraduate courses. Alan

wrote of Song of Lawino, "Even in translation the forceful imagery comes across. Lawino's lament about her husband's abandonment of traditional African ways is marked by biting invective that is nevertheless highly poetic. Her husband's response is in an angry, mocking tone...Yet Ocol's verbal abuse of his wife cannot completely hide the strong ties that still bind him to the ancient traditions subconsciously. His spirited speech is full of metaphors and symbols of his ancestral past." Michael wrote in detail about the imagery evoked in the same poem by the symbol of "the last safari to Pagak" (death).

Kathy, as did many students, admired Gretel Ehrlich's wry anecdotes and fresh metaphors. "They weren't the usual 'She is pretty as a rose.'" She especially liked, "Cowboys are like piles of rocks; everything happens to them." Larry wrote of Kim Chernin's writing in Reinventing Eve, "She takes us into an idea, leads us into it through a kind of repetition, until it reverberates in our very souls....Her writing is never stagnant; it moves always forward in a stream-of-consciousness sometimes, a formal form others, but we are committed to it once we start." Carol agreed: "Her [Chernin's] language was so strong it gave me goosebumps. She packed adjective after descriptive adjective until by the time a sentence was finished, I felt like I had descended with her, exposed my soul and ascended back up the spiral staircase."

These students have polished some of the skills necessary for being excited and moved by literature.

In addition, many students made the statement in their journals, bittersweet to those of us who always hope for change, that they never expected to have their minds and actions altered by a literature course; this semester, it had happened. They acknowledged new attitudes about lives in other times and places, and especially a growing commitment to understand and care for what had been the ultimate other, nature and its inhabitants. "When I looked at the world before, I didn't feel personally responsible for it, for other people or animals. I either figured a higher power would take care of it or it could take care of itself. I think that we humans are self-centered; we only worry about ourselves. If we realize we are part of the rest of the world, then maybe we will look after what is part of us."

From 10:00 to 12:00, on Mondays and Thursdays, in J-8, Sept. 4 to Dec. 23, 1991, using the universal theme of humans and nature, my students and I read, argued, and asked many hard questions about the variety of ways people, past and present, have found to live in and understand the natural world; inevitably, the answers were not easily available, and often they were unpalatable. The students in this elective literature class, eighty percent of whom were women, were predominantly second or third generation European-Americans of Irish and Italian Catholic background. Only five of them had traveled outside the United States. At the end of the semester they referred most often and most fondly to two characters from the books we read--one woman from India and another from Africa.

Required Texts for ENL 399, Fall, 1991

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Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. New York: The New American Library, 1965.

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Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, trans., Burton Raffel. New York: The New American Library, 1970

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Webb, Mary. Precious Bane. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1981.

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